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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 000662

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SUBJECT: BJP CLAIMS A NEW MAJORITY IN BANGALORE

REF: A) CHENNAI 629, B) CHENNAI 620 C) CHENNAI 611

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A newly reformed BJP-JD(S) coalition now claims to have a majority in the South Indian state of Karnataka's legislature. It has demanded that the governor re-activate the state's legislative assembly and ask the coalition to form a government. The Congress-appointed governor has been administering the state since the declaration of "President's Rule" following the collapse of the previous BJP-JD(S) coalition on October 8 (reftels). He appears in no hurry to relinquish control and apparently has no legal requirement to heed the new coalition's demands. The BJP-JD(S) will attempt to use public pressure to convince the governor. The Congress Party may well allow the new coalition to rule Karnataka again, fully expecting that the two parties will soon be at each other's throats again, allowing Congress to benefit from early elections that will follow another government collapse. End summary.

A majority parade for the governor

¶2. (U) A newly reconstituted BJP-JD(S) coalition paraded 129 members of Karnataka's legislature in front of Governor Rameshwar Thakur's office on October 29 to demonstrate that it has more than the 113 votes necessary to create a majority. The new coalition elected BJP member B.S. Yeddyurappa, who served as Deputy Chief Minister in the BJP-JD(S) coalition that collapsed in early October, as its leader. If he becomes Chief Minister (CM), it would be the first time that the BJP has held the top job in any state in South India. (The new coalition chief was known as Yeddiurappa until October 11, when he reportedly changed the spelling of his name on the advice of astrologers.)

Dissent in the JD(S) ranks

¶3. (SBU) Not all JD(S) members are happy with the new arrangement. Dissident JD(S) legislator M.P. Prakash, flew to New Delhi the previous week to discuss with Congress leaders a possible JD(S)-Congress coalition. A senior Congress state leader told us that a deal to make Prakash the new Chief Minister (CM) with Congress's support was "more or less agreed upon" when it was spiked by JD(S) former CM Kumaraswamy. According to this source, Kumaraswamy convinced party chief Deve Gowda (conveniently, Kumaraswamy's father) to re-ally with the BJP to ensure that a member of Deve Gowda's immediate family (another son is also a prominent politician) remains near the CM's post in Karnataka. Prakash's deal, this Congress leader told us, would have left Deve Gowda and his progeny out in the cold.

¶4. (U) Prakash claimed to have enough support from his fellow Lingayat caste members within the JD(S) to prevent the new BJP-JD(S) coalition from creating a majority, but only three JD(S) members

joined Prakash in avoiding the show of support in front of the governor's office. Prakash reportedly told the governor that the new BJP-JD(S) tie-up was "illegal and unethical," claiming that Deve Gowda had joined back with the BJP without consulting the party's membership.

Governor in the driver's seat

15. (SBU) The governor apparently has no legal requirement to heed the new coalition's demands. The BJP's point man on Karnataka told us that "everything now rests in the hands of the governor," saying that even though the BJP and JD(S) may claim to have a majority, the governor is in possession of a letter from the BJP, written as the former government collapsed, that calls for early elections. He admitted that the governor could make himself look foolish if he allowed the parties to try again to form a government and they failed. He also told us that the decision about whether or not to allow the BJP to form a new coalition would be made by Congress leaders in New Delhi. He speculated that Sonia Gandhi may make the decision soon after her return from China on October 30.

Congress may want a BJP-JD(S) coalition

16. (SBU) The senior Congress state leader told us that Congress is leaning towards allowing the BJP and JD(S) to take the reins of power again. He said that Congress expects that their re-constituted alliance will soon founder, discrediting both parties completely and forcing an election that Congress will win.

Comment

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17. (SBU) The short-term outlook for the BJP and JD(S) forming a coalition looks good, but it's not a sure thing. Although he may have no legal obligation to end President's Rule, it would be awkward for the governor to ignore the apparent majority now mustered by the two parties. If Congress decides to keep the governor in charge, there's apparently little the BJP can do beyond issuing public rebukes. The Congress Party will, however, pay a political price for what will be seen as undermining the democratic process if it keeps the legislature suspended under President's Rule despite the coalition proving it has a clear majority. Such a decision by the party could also be challenged in the courts. There are precedents where courts have censured governors and the Federal Government for preventing a coalition formation from proving its majority on the floor of the legislature.

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